

PROPHETIC PREACHING FROM A PASTORAL BASE

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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June 1975

This professional project, completed by

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of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Jaeger C. Haegele, Jr.
Dean

for my love,
the Church

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express appreciation to my Project Committee, composed of Dr. K. Morgan Edwards and Dr. Ronald E. Osborn, for their guidance as I wrote this paper. Their methods of suggesting changes and corrections were done in a sensitive and encouraging way. I also thank Dr. Edwards for teaching me preaching and helping me realize its importance. He is still one of the best stand-up (traditional) preachers I know.

I am indebted to Dr. Harvey Seifert, who guided my outline, and Dr. Dan Rhoades, who helped me define my thesis and how I would approach it.

Finally, I express my love to my wife, Pam, who is always there loving and supporting me--not to mention all the typing she did.

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Two significant roles of the minister, prophet and pastor, are not usually found together in today's parish minister. There are many ministers who are good pastors to their people, but most of these persons shy away from prophetic preaching. They feel it hurts more than it helps. They don't want to take the risk of controversy. They believe that conflict is always unhealthy. On the other hand, there are ministers who stand in the pulpit and declare judgment in the name of the Lord and consider themselves prophets. Instead of their words being challenging they are alienating.

Here at the School of Theology at Claremont there has been a much greater interest by the students and ministers in pastoral care and counseling than in preaching. Many ministers feel preaching takes too much time and does very little good. This attitude is verified by the ill-prepared sermons coming from the pulpits. As preaching has weakened so has the church. The lack of authentic prophetic preaching is a major problem in the church.

The thesis of this project is: IF AUTHENTIC PROPHETIC PREACHING IS GOING TO TAKE PLACE, IT MUST HAVE A FIRM PASTORAL CARE BASE. The local church provides the best opportunity for this combination of prophetic preaching and pastoral care to take place.

The approach to the problem includes a brief look at the history and theology of the prophetic office in the Bible and centers down on a workable definition of prophetic preaching. The second chapter analyzes the preaching of two of the great prophetic voices of the twentieth century: Ernest Fremont Tittle and James Armstrong. The

third chapter explores psychological and sociological insights for prophetic preaching. The fourth chapter is an attempt to offer specific recommendations for prophetic preaching today. The final chapter is a brief conclusion.

The author concludes by stating that prophetic preaching is greatly needed in the church today in a way that is relevant to modern humankind.

Prophetic preaching is preaching that deals with all of life, from personal salvation to social witness. It is taking the great themes of the Bible and bringing their truths to bear on the personal lives of people. It is helping people to see the ethical and social demands of the Gospel. Prophetic preaching involves a person who can create a relationship of trust and respect between himself or herself and his or her parishioners--a courageous person who preaches from a deep commitment to God and his Church, and compassion for people--a person who can communicate God's love even in the midst of conflict and controversy.

The social sciences of psychology and sociology provide research tools and resources for building a prophetic style of ministry. Knowing the dynamics of motivation and change in the individual and the group is necessary for the prophet.

The minister must face the reality of "risk" that is very much a part of prophetic ministry. He or she must take up the Cross even when it involves personal risk.

The prophetic preaching pastor is the person in the church

who will never go out of style. Although the definition may change, the need for challenge, guidance and love will always be needed by people. The minister who can create a firm pastoral base on which he or she proclaims the "whole" Gospel, is the authentic preacher.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem

Few ministers are prophetic preachers. Many ministers succeed in being pastors. In a Venn diagram ministers with these roles would only slightly overlap if at all. This is sad but true. The two greatest roles of the minister, prophet and pastor, usually are not found together in today's parish minister.

There are many sincerely dedicated persons who are good pastors to their people, and for this ministry we are thankful. However, most of these persons shy away from prophetic preaching. They feel it hurts more than it helps. They don't want to take the risk of controversy. They believe that conflict is always unhealthy. Leaving a church with some disagreement might leave an "unsuccessful" mark on their record, and this would add to their insecurity.

On the other hand there are ministers who stand in the pulpit and declare judgment in the name of the Lord and consider themselves prophets. Instead of their words being challenging they are alienating. Laurence Hull Stookey, Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, writes:

People may consider the minister a coward who has used the sermon as an implement of warfare and the pulpit as a fortress behind which to hide while deploying it . . . The deep tragedy is this: Because the hearers can attribute the sermon to a base

motive, they may shrug it off without ever wrestling with the real truth it contains; thus the Word of God is nullified, and the fault lies as much in him who speaks as in him who listens.¹

Here at the School of Theology at Claremont there has been a much greater interest by the students and ministers in pastoral care and counseling than in preaching. Many ministers feel preaching takes too much time and does very little good. This attitude is verified by the ill-prepared sermons coming from the pulpits. As preaching has weakened so has the church. Sermons are still preached every Sunday in worship services but they are far from prophetic. The lack of authentic prophetic preaching is a major problem in the church.

Approach to Problem

To solve this problem it will take more than just developing eloquent speakers. Prophetic preaching involves much more than well-written sermons. The thesis of this dissertation is: IF AUTHENTIC PROPHETIC PREACHING IS GOING TO TAKE PLACE, IT MUST HAVE A FIRM PASTORAL CARE BASE. Arthur L. Teikmanis puts it this way: "Preaching and pastoral care are as closely and dynamically related as love is to its expressions."²

The local church provides the best opportunity for authentic prophetic preaching. It is a situation where the minister has the

¹Laurence Hull Stookey, "Prophetic Preaching or Personal Pique?" *Preaching Today*, VI:1 (1971), 3-6.

²Arthur L. Teikmanis, *Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 12.

chance to share joys and sorrows with the people. These times build close and trusting relationships. The minister learns who the people are, what issues of life they are struggling with, and what are their needs. Bishop Gerald Kennedy writes:

We must always be pastors before we can be prophets. It has grown on me with the passing years that if we are to serve the Church, we must combine the offices of prophet and pastor until the people will be hard put to tell where one begins and the other leaves off.³

The approach to the problem will include a brief look at the history and theology of the prophetic office in the Bible and center down on a workable definition of prophetic preaching. The second chapter will analyze the preaching of two of the great prophetic voices of the twentieth century: Ernest Fremont Tittle and James Armstrong. The third chapter will explore psychological and sociological insights for prophetic preaching. The fourth chapter will be an attempt to offer specific recommendations for prophetic preaching today. The final chapter will be a brief conclusion.

The Prophetic Office in the Bible

The prophetic office as recorded in the Bible begins in the ninth century; has its high-points in the eighth and seventh centuries; and comes to a close in the sixth century. Prophecy appeared much later than the age-old institution of the priesthood. Gerhard von Rad believes the origin of prophecy can be traced to considerably earlier

³Gerald Kennedy, *The Seven Worlds of the Minister* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 90.

times, although it is a difficult problem. He writes:

There is not enough source material, and what there is is not sufficiently homogeneous, to allow us to draw up anything like a history of the movement, or even a rough sketch of its first beginnings.⁴

The prophetic office in the Bible allowed diversity. There were different kinds of prophets and different kinds of prophecy. There were prophets who were in various ways incorporated within the official cult, and there were those like Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, who were members of a radical wing which increasingly declared its independence from the official cult.⁵ There were prophets who preached, and prophets who wrote. There were city prophets and country prophets. There were effective women prophets (Ex. 15:20; II Kings 22:14; Neh. 6:14), as well as men prophets.⁶ The prophetic office consisted on the one hand of binding commitments and on the other of liberties and powers.⁷

The methods of the prophets to communicate their message was different, innovative, and often shocking. Von Rad says:

What these men wanted to do, of course, was to attract attention: indeed sometimes, as when, for example, they laid violent hands on some time-hallowed sacral form of expression, their express intention was to shock their audience.⁸

The content of the message determined the choice of its form of delivery. Traditional forms were not suitable for the vital subject-

⁴Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), II, 6.

⁵Ibid., II, 52.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., II, 50.

⁸Ibid., II, 38.

matter itself demanded nothing short of a bold method of expression.⁹

The most frequently used form for their message was the "messenger formula" because they understood their role as ambassadors or messengers of Yahweh. The message was usually prefaced by a diatribe in the case of a divine threat, and an exhortation in the case of a promise. The message was the direct word of God, and the preface was a human word that prepared the way.¹⁰ Other forms used were: a priestly direction concerning sacrifice, a cultic hymn, a pronouncement in a court of law, a teaching of wisdom, and a popular song.¹¹

Stookey points out three characteristics the prophets had in common. The first was their unwillingness to undertake the job. Moses told God the people would not believe him and he did not speak well enough to be a leader (Ex. 4:1, 10). One of Jeremiah's excuses was that he was too young (Jer. 1:6). Amos told God he was no prophet; only a herdsman (Amos 7:14). All of these men felt inadequate to speak for God. Stookey refers to the prophets as "reluctant messengers."

The second characteristic was the prophets' compassion toward those to whom they spoke. They spoke words of truth in the spirit of love and concern. Their purpose was to help the people realize their sin and blindness. The true prophets did not talk "down" to the people, but considered themselves as one of them. They did not feel self-righteous, but felt pity when the people would not repent and rejoiced

⁹Ibid., II, 39.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 37.

¹¹Ibid., II, 38.

when they did.¹²

The final characteristic of the prophets was that their preaching gave hope. They felt a responsibility not only to proclaim God's judgment, but also his mercies. The prophets vigorously condemned evil and just as vigorously told of God's victory over evil. They preached that those who trusted in him will share in his victory. They gave the people hope in a Lord who is their refuge and stronghold.¹³

The prophets spoke in and for their time in history. Their message was not meant to be the word or the action for today. The great truths they spoke are limited for the contemporary world. This is why there is a need for prophetic preaching today; ministers who will speak to the needs and pains of the seventies. This is not to minimize the importance of the biblical prophets, but to put their importance and contribution in the proper place. It is because of the tradition of biblical prophecy that we should continue to preach prophetically. It was proven to be theologically necessary for the living of "those" days, and it is theologically necessary for the living of "these" days.

Definition of Prophetic Preaching

Prophetic preaching is often thought of as preaching on social or political issues. This is sometimes the case, but this is only a

¹²Stookey, p. 4.

¹³Ibid., p. 5.

small part of prophetic preaching. Authentic prophetic preaching deals with all of life; from personal salvation to social witness. It is taking the great themes of the Bible and bringing truth to bear on the personal lives of people. It is helping people see the ethical and social demands of the Gospel. Prophetic preaching is preaching the "whole Gospel." K. Morgan Edwards says "All great prophetic preachers preached the whole Gospel."¹⁴

Prophetic preaching is more than words; it involves a person. This person who is a prophetic preacher is described by Henry Mitchell as a "pastor, friend, advocate, and hero."¹⁵ Authentic prophetic preaching cannot be done in isolation. Mutual trust and respect between the pastor and his people provide an open and growing situation. It frees the pulpit to be prophetic.

Prophetic preaching is never popular preaching. It is presenting the Gospel in a confronting and demanding way. It challenges people to change their attitudes. It raises the consciousness of people. It calls into question peoples' life styles. Harold Bosley says: "The prophetic ministry never has been or ever will be welcomed by mankind."¹⁶ Prophetic preaching may never be popular, but it will be listened to and needed.

The courage to preach prophetically comes from a deep

¹⁴K. Morgan Edwards, personal interview, March 5, 1974.

¹⁵Henry Mitchell, personal interview, May 2, 1974.

¹⁶James Armstrong, *Wilderness Voices* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 31.

commitment to God and his Church, and compassion for people. Prophetic preaching brings people face to face with the hard realities of life, but is not fatalistic. It helps people grow and deal creatively with issues or personal problems. It gives hope by proclaiming the grace of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER II

ERNEST FREMONT TITTLE AND JAMES ARMSTRONG AS MODELS

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUNDS

Ernest Fremont Tittle

Ernest Fremont Tittle was born October 21, 1885, in Springfield, Ohio. He was a town boy and knew an environment not unlike that of millions of Americans born at the turn of the century. In high school and college he was a hard-working, studious, self-disciplined person. He did not believe in wasting his time. Because of his academic excellence and leadership abilities, he was president of his senior class in high school and president of the Ohio Wesleyan YMCA. Robert Miller writes:

Despite the many surface manifestations to the contrary, he was a lonely boy, burdened with responsibilities he neither could nor would lay aside, pricked by an implacable conscience, driven to climb toward a goal of high recognition.¹

Tittle attended Wittenberg College in his home town for one year. The next year he transferred to Ohio Wesleyan, a Methodist school in Delaware. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan, completing the four year college curriculum in three years, with Phi Beta Kappa honors. There was no change in his attitude toward his studies at

¹Robert Moats Miller, *How Shall They Hear Without a Preacher* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. 28.

Drew Theological Seminary. He completed the three year program in two years. Years later Tittle commented that his preparation for the ministry wasn't as fruitful as he would have liked it to have been. One of the reasons may have been the pace that he set for himself. He imposed upon himself a schedule that allowed little time for relaxation.

Upon graduation from seminary in 1908, he married Glenna Myers and they were appointed to a four-point country circuit around Christiansburg, Ohio. They soon became parents of a son. During this time he became discouraged and frustrated and would have left the ministry if he had not discovered the "social gospel" of Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch gave him a basis for preaching through World War I and on into the opening years of his ministry at Evanston.

After two years at Christiansburg, Tittle was appointed to the Riverdale Methodist Episcopal Church in Dayton, Ohio. Three years later he became the pastor of Willian Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Delaware. This was one of the major churches in Ohio Methodism with a history of almost a century. Here their second child and first daughter was born. The students and professors who came to hear him preach provided a stimulus and challenge to him. Although his preaching had not reached full maturity, it was clear and direct. He was not afraid to deal with the "issues," especially those on social and industrial problems, in which he was intensely interested.

In 1916, when Tittle was only thirty, the Trustees of Ohio Wesleyan came within one vote of electing him president. It was in

the same year he was appointed to the Broad Street Methodist Church in the capitol city of Ohio, Columbus. He was the youngest minister in the history of the church.

Tittle received a call to be the pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Evanston, Illinois in 1917. Feeling he could not leave Broad Street after only a year of service, he told them that he could not accept at that time but would come next year if they still felt he was the man they wanted. They called him again in 1918 and he accepted the invitation. World War I had broken out and Tittle felt strongly about serving his country. With the permission of First Church he spent six months in France as a YMCA secretary before assuming his duties as the senior minister at Evanston.

Tittle came back from the war a more mature and tremendously changed man. He now realized the folly of war. He saw it as a defiance of the will of God and took a strong pacifist stance. Tittle also rejected power politics, imperialism, and all the social and political practices which could lead to war.

On December 1, 1918, Ernest Fremont Tittle, at the young age of thirty-three, preached his first sermon at the church where he was to spend the rest of his life. For more than thirty years his preaching ministry at the First Methodist Church of Evanston, Illinois was one of the most outstanding in Protestantism. Six years after he went to Evanston, he was chosen as one of the twenty-five outstanding American Protestant preachers by "The Christian Century." By 1941, he was chosen by the readers of "The Christian Century Pulpit" as one of

the six leading clergymen. He remained one of the ablest preachers in America until his death. He was also the author of several books and was in demand as a preacher and lecturer at the leading universities and seminaries.

The prophetic path that Tittle chose was not always popular or easy. He bore an enormous burden. After 1937 (his first heart attack), he gradually became weaker physically but this could never be seen in his preaching. In the pulpit he was as effective as ever. Ernest Fremont Tittle died on August 3, 1949, three days after preaching the last sermon in his summer series. Miller writes: "Tittle died as he wished, quickly and while 'in harness.'"²

Paul Hutchinson, a close friend of Tittle's wrote these words a few days after his death.

It is not often that I meet a preacher who seems to me to have been foreordained to that high calling from his mother's womb. Most prominent ministers suggest the eminence they might have attained in other pursuits: 'What a great jurist he would have made!' Or 'what a great corporation promoter!' Or 'what a great actor!' But it was never possible for me to think of Ernest Tittle as anything but a Christian preacher. For this he was born, predestined, foreordained--and let his Methodist brethren make of such Calvinism what they please.³

James Armstrong

James Arthur Armstrong is now forty-nine years old and in the prime of his ministerial life. He is the son of a United Methodist

²Ibid., p. 513.

³Ibid., pp. 11, 12, citing Paul Hutchinson, "A Word About a Friend," *Christian Century*, LXVI (August 17, 1949), 958.

preacher and was born in 1925 in Marion, Indiana. Because of his "relative youth," there has been nothing written about his life as a boy. Jim married Phyllis Jeanne Shaeffer of San Bernardino, California and they have five children. He graduated from Florida Southern College in 1948. He went to seminary at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia (Candler School of Theology). George Comes, a classmate of Armstrong's and a personal friend of mine, told me that Armstrong was a guy with something extra "on the ball." It was obvious in seminary that he would be a leader in the Church. He graduated from Candler in 1952 and since has done some further graduate study at the University of Chicago and Boston University.

In 1958, only six years out of seminary and at the age of thirty-three, Armstrong was transferred to the Indiana Conference from the Florida Conference to become the senior minister of Broadway Methodist Church of Indianapolis, Indiana. Broadway is a large church with over three thousand members. In his ten years at Broadway he became involved in city, state, and even national political and social action. He was named "Outstanding Young Man of the Year" by the Indianapolis Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1959. In 1964 he was appointed by President Johnson to the National Citizens Committee for Community Relations. Armstrong was called one of the twelve "movers and shakers" of his city (the only minister) by "Indianapolis News" in 1966. He was singled out as "one of the leaders who builds cities" by Time-Life in its book, *The Heartland*.

While at Broadway Church, Armstrong's prophetic ministry

became a model for Methodism and all Protestantism. He was recognized as one of the prophetic voices in the Church and was elected to represent the Church at the 1964 and 1968 Jurisdictional Conferences. In 1968 he was also honored by being a delegate to the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. When he left Indianapolis in August of 1968, WFBM-TV editorialized:

In his church and community service (James Armstrong) has demonstrated the personal courage, commitment and social involvement that are vital in major positions of church leadership if the churches are to minister to . . . our modern society.⁴

Armstrong left Broadway because he was elected to the Episcopacy. He was elected July 27, 1968 on the twelfth ballot in the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in Peoria, Illinois. He was assigned to the Dakotas Area, which he is still serving. Since becoming a bishop in the United Methodist Church he has become more involved in national and international political and social action. He was a member of the United States Study Team on Religious and Political Freedom in Vietnam in 1969; the Paris Consultation on Rebuilding Vietnam in 1969; and the Congressional Conference on War and National Responsibility in 1970. Bishop Armstrong was a delegate to the National Council of Churches in 1972 and represented them during the seventy-one day siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1973. He is now president of United Methodism's Board of Church and Society (1972-76) and chairperson of the Coordinating Committee on

⁴Based on personal correspondence between Bishop James Armstrong, Dakotas Area of the United Methodist Church, and the writer, July 18, 1974, citing Editorial on WFBM-TV, August 1968.

Peace and the Self-Development of Peoples.

Armstrong has authored several books and numerous articles for magazines and journals. His prophetic voice as a preacher and lecturer is becoming more and more influential in the Church and society.

EVIDENCES FROM THEIR LIVES AND SERMONS OF A PROPHETIC MINISTRY

Remembering that Tittle's ministry ended in 1949, and Armstrong's began in 1952, we see that these two prophetic voices have covered almost all of the twentieth century thus far. Even though they preached in different generations, they dealt with many of the same issues such as war and racism. The tone of the times was different and therefore demanded a different approach. Armstrong, recognizing this, writes:

Ernest Fremont Tittle was a liberal, vintage 1920-50. He was not William Sloane Coffin on trial for conspiracy or George Webber standing before the Justice Department in chains during Holy Week of 1971. He was not Father Groppi challenging the Wisconsin state legislature or the brothers Berrigan destroying draft cards and going to jail. He was not a civil rights activist with the style and political involvement of a Jesse Jackson or a Walter Fauntroy (both clergymen). He was not Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa addressing the Security Council of the United Nations, pleading for racial justice in Ian Smith's white-dominated Rhodesia. But remember the time! Those of us who are older--what were we doing in 1935, in 1945, for social justice? Tittle was a white preacher serving a wealthy white congregation in a conservative city thirty years ago. His was a brand of courage unknown to many young 'revolutionaries' today.⁵

⁵James Armstrong, *Wilderness Voices* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 30, 31.

As early as 1921 Tittle preached and acted against racial discrimination. He was one of the founders and first president of the Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination, and also was a member of the Inter-racial Commission of Greater Chicago. He fought for racial justice in the Church, civic administration, and national policy. Tittle insisted that if Christianity were really practiced, there would be no race relations problems. In his sermon for Sunday, February 29, 1948, he declared, "The Christian view of man calls for abolition of all discriminations based on race, creed, or color."⁶ One of Tittle's last acts was to will his library to a Negro seminary.

Tittle's experience on the battlefield of France caused him to preach with deep feelings against war. In his Yale lectures he declared: "There would seem to be but one proper position for Christians to take with respect to war; they should set themselves in opposition to it and to everything that invites it." He preached peace, not as an abstraction but with concrete suggestions. He called for strong international government to be responsible for keeping peace. He called for disarmament and for providing economic and technological aid to backward nations.⁷

Tittle challenged our capitalistic system. He said that

⁶Harold A. Brack, "E. F. Tittle's Theory and Practice," *Preaching, a Journal of Homiletics*, I:1 (1966), 18, citing *The First Church Pulpit* (Evanston, Illinois) VII:1, pp. 3, 4.

⁷Brack, p. 18.

profit-seeking was contrary to the will of God. He disagreed with the idea that profit is essential as a motivating factor in a sound economy. He also defended the right of government to regulate any part of the economy in behalf of the general welfare.⁸ In his sermon, "The Problem of Freedom," he said:

If as a businessman or professional man, I do not regulate myself in moral regard for the welfare of my community, then government must and will step in and regulate me.⁹

Slum clearance was another issue Tittle stood for vigorously. He preached that the dignity of persons is a Christian duty and responsibility. He said: "To be with Christ is to seek for every man the opportunity of a decent house."¹⁰

During the time when people were suspicious of science and its conflict with religion, Tittle condemned the efforts of William Jennings Bryan to prevent the teaching of evolution in the public schools. He felt that science and religion were not in conflict, and that many Christian assertions were supported by science.¹¹ Tittle said it like this: "I shall venture to suggest not only that a man may believe in evolution and still believe in God, but that a convinced evolutionist may find a positive support for his religion."¹²

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., citing Ernest Fremont Tittle, *A Mighty Fortress* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 6.

¹⁰Brack, pp. 18, 19.

¹¹Ibid., p. 19.

¹²Ibid., citing Charles Clayton Morrison, *The American Pulpit* (Chicago: Christian Century Press, 1925), p. 346.

Tittle's prophetic style of preaching and ministering did not go without sharp criticism from several powerful conservative groups. Among these were The American Legion, the Chicago *Tribune*, and The Paul Reveres. The latter group accused him of being a communist. There were two occasions when the criticism became so intense that the Evanston church official board thought it necessary to speak out in support of their pastor. They issued these statements to let the critical groups and the entire community know that Tittle was to regard the pulpit of their church as a free pulpit where he could express his convictions freely.¹³

James Armstrong is now a bishop, but he established a strong prophetic ministry while he was a pastor. His words to the assembly's five hundred delegates when elected bishop were:

I would thank the Broadway Church in Indianapolis for whatever preparation I bring to this moment. Most of you know the commitments of my life and the style of my ministry. I promise you that I will only seek to extend these opportunities for leadership.¹⁴

Armstrong's style of ministry as a pastor was total commitment and involvement in the community he served. His preaching "rang clear" because he not only talked Christian social action, he "walked it." At a time when the Church in America had experienced numerical success and had become complacent and conservative, Armstrong's articulate and prophetic voice became a source of hope.

¹³Brack, p. 19.

¹⁴*Together/News Edition*, Dakotas Area, XII:10 (October 1968), A-1.

Armstrong was not afraid to preach partisan politics from his pulpit or to be politically involved in the community. He writes:

The minister of Jesus Christ does not surrender his citizenship at the time of his ordination. It is my firm conviction that he has the perfect right to advocate those causes and support those candidates that reflect the values of the Christian faith as he understands and experiences them.¹⁵

Armstrong publicly supported a "reform" candidate for mayor of Indianapolis. He worked on behalf of Senator McCarthy in the 1968 Democratic primary. He believed in what these men stood for and showed it through his actions. Both of these candidates lost.

While at Broadway Church, Armstrong was faced with many controversial issues such as: the House Un-American Activities Committee film "Operation Abolition," the Supreme Court decision on prayer in public schools, racial strife, urban renewal, and the war in Vietnam.

The Black people of America were demanding their civil rights. The White communities were resentful of the freedom marches that were taking place throughout the country and were becoming 'uptight.' Armstrong proclaimed that the race problem was a religious problem. In his sermon, "Long Minutes," he said:

Where human relationships break down, where blind prejudice infects the climate of society, where cruel patterns of discrimination lash out at particular persons because of their religion or their nationality or their color--there sin exists. . . . Thus it becomes our responsibility as members of the Church of Jesus Christ to create an atmosphere in which the right kind of education, conversation, political action, and lawmaking can take place. . . . The American Negro has been the victim of our long minutes of hesitation, short-sightedness, and sadistic inhumanity. . . . In the name of Jesus Christ let us, then, turn long

¹⁵James Armstrong, "A Churchman's Involvement in Partisan Politics," *Christian Advocate* (February 3, 1972), 7.

minutes of humiliation, and suffering into 'the time of the Lord,' when justice and righteousness will prevail as the ethic of the cross is related to the most grievous scandal of the here and now.¹⁶

Armstrong preached and acted against our involvement in the Vietnam War. He became one of the leading workers in the Church for peace. Because of this commitment to peace in the world, after becoming a bishop he was chosen to represent our country and the Church on study teams and in conferences involving the war and our national responsibility.

In comparison, Tittle was overtly less active socially. Armstrong was a "doer," a Christian humanist. Tittle was more profoundly and more deeply grounded in the classical theological tradition than Armstrong. Tittle's life seems to have changed more radically than Armstrong's. Tittle's outlook on war, economics, and power politics were not a part of his preaching until after his experiences in World War I. Armstrong's theology has also matured during his life, but his turn toward prophetic preaching was not so abrupt.

Armstrong and Tittle agree that prophetic preaching is more than just motivating people with words about action. Armstrong writes: "No longer can preaching be seen as an end in itself."¹⁷ . . . It must be linked with social action, community outreach, and

¹⁶James Armstrong, "Long Minutes," in Alfred T. Davies (ed.) *The Pulpit Speaks on Race* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 19-21.

¹⁷James Armstrong, *The Urgent Now* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 13.

a wholistic response to human need."¹⁸ Almost fifty years earlier Tittle was using different words but saying the same thing when he wrote:

What really matters is not that we should say what prophets said, but that we should see as prophets saw . . . that we too should dare to climb the steep ascent to heaven through peril, toil and pain.¹⁹

Tittle and Armstrong never avoided the controversial issues. They believed the Church, if it is to be vital and relevant, must speak creatively to these issues. However they both felt there was more to prophetic preaching than dealing with the controversial topical "happenings" of the day. Although Armstrong encourages ministers "to advocate those causes and support those candidates that reflect the values of the Christian faith," he also warns them against "turning their pulpits into political platforms."²⁰ Every week these men felt a tremendous responsibility to preach to their people's spiritual needs. They communicated the great themes and theology of the Bible in a way that helped people to clearly hear and understand the demands of the Gospel on their lives. Tittle wrote: "Spiritually helpful preaching is not passe, nor will it ever be."²¹ Their

¹⁸Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁹Ernest Fremont Tittle, *What Must the Church Do to Be Saved?* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1921), p. 12.

²⁰Armstrong, "A Churchman's Involvement . . . ," p. 8.

²¹Ernest Fremont Tittle, *The Foolishness of Preaching* (New York: Holt, 1930), p. 309.

parishioners were able to take action in their communities because the meaning of God was revealed to them in a "truth based" prophetic way.

For Tittle and Armstrong, being a prophetic preacher meant being a loving pastor. Robert Miller, in his biography of Tittle, observed that he was a real shepherd to his flock. He writes:

It is important to remember (for it is so often forgotten) that he was a faithful minister of Jesus Christ (pastor) long before he became nationally famous as the great preacher of 'The Cathedral of Methodism' in Evanston.²²

Tittle realized that to preach prophetically he must "know the human heart, and no man can know the human heart unless he keeps in close touch with human lives."²³ He gave of himself completely to the needs of his parishioners.

Tittle and Armstrong were given freedom in the pulpit because they earned the love and respect of their people. Tittle came to believe that if preachers love their people and give them abundant reason to know that they do, they can say anything to them that needs to be said.²⁴ Although there are ministers who feel this principle is no longer valid, Armstrong agrees with Tittle. In a personal letter I asked Armstrong if he had much time in a church the size of Broadway for pastoral duties. His letter of response contained this answer:

²²Miller, p. 48.

²³Tittle, *The Foolishness of Preaching*, p. 305.

²⁴Miller, p. 180.

I took the time. During two or three years of my ministry at Broadway, I was spending as much as twenty hours per week in pastoral counseling. Although we later developed a counseling center with other clinically trained ministers, my own counseling responsibilities continued. I shared hospital calls with the other clergy on the staff. I was available for crisis counseling or visitation at any hour. Our home phone was listed, so that I could be available. I took care of my own premarital counseling and sought to relate to each grief situation I was asked to respond to. I cannot envision ministry apart from that pastoral relationship.²⁵

Ernest Fremont Tittle and James Armstrong were and still are great models for prophetic ministry. They combined the roles of prophet and pastor to meet people's needs. Armstrong's latest book, *Wilderness Voices*, points out some of the prophetic voices of recent times. My only criticism of the book is that he left someone out-- himself!

²⁵Armstrong, personal correspondence, July 18, 1974.

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FOR PROPHETIC PREACHING

Studying the Situation

If a minister is to preach prophetically to people he or she must know their *sitz-im-leben* (setting in life). This involves knowing who they are and what they want to do. This also involves looking at the history of the church and community. It is important to know what kinds of experiences they have had in the past. To preach from their perspective, a minister needs to understand their human predicament. He or she needs to know their reference groups or people they are involved with other than church groups.

In some churches the membership does not reflect the immediate community. In these situations the people may be the least reliable criteria a minister has to determine an accurate picture. Many downtown churches are an example of this. However, this does not mean that a minister should not get to know the immediate community and instead spend all his or her time in the suburbs or surrounding areas. This makes the minister's work more difficult but it is imperative that he or she know the situation in both areas. Although the people in the immediate area do not attend services, there may be a valid ministry that can be carried on there.

There are several good ways of getting to know the sociological

dynamics of a community. One way would be to talk with and get to know some of the people at city hall. The city planner, or someone in his or her office, could introduce the minister to the city historically and geographically. Talking with the city council persons would be helpful in finding out about the people's social situations, problems, and attitudes in the different districts of the city. Attending school board meetings is a way to know the community better.

A second way of getting to know "what's happening" in the community is through people in the church. There are usually some members of the church who are actively involved in the community who would be glad to talk with the minister.

Another way of getting to know the community, and one which many ministers do and find fruitful, is to join a service club (e.g., Rotary, Lions, Optimist, etc.). This brings the minister into a fraternal relationship with some of the leading civic and business leaders in the community. The major drawback of joining a service club is that it limits a minister to one group of people, and takes up a considerable amount of time.

Gerhard von Rad writes that for the Old Testament prophets to have made the succinct characterizations of the people in their prophecies which they did, they must have attentively looked around and observed the people.¹ The make-up and character of the people made a difference in their styles of prophecy. Without knowing where

¹Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), II, 75.

and how people live during the week it is impossible to preach to their needs on Sunday. Without knowing the struggles and the hopes of the community a minister cannot speak to these issues. Without sharing the people's view of how they see themselves in the present and how they see their destiny, there can be no common ground for communication.

Establishing Relationships Through Pastoral Care

Studying the sociology and history of a community and its people is important but only the first step in a minister's relationship with the people. The next step is establishing personal relationships with the people in the church. Ministry is not first of all activity, but acknowledgement of oneness with fellowmen in the world.² People want to know the minister as a person and as a fellow Christian. The genius of Jesus' ministry was his identification with the people to whom he came. His ministry was his oneness with mankind.³ A close relationship between the minister and the people does not automatically happen after a certain period of time. It does take time, but it also takes a sincere attitude of warmth and love for people. Ministers need to be "touchable." Those who stay aloof from the people, spending most of their time in the study or in staff meetings, cannot feel the heartbeat of the congregation. There is no common ground for communication. The sermon, no matter how beautifully

²Ronald E. Osborn, *In Christ's Place* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1967), p. 28.

³*Ibid.*, p. 26.

written does not deal with the questions the people are asking.

A minister has many ways to establish personal relationships with his or her parishioners. Home visitation is an excellent way of getting to know people in their family environment. This can be time consuming and may be difficult for a minister of a large church. However, I would suggest that a minister budget his or her time so there would be some time for visiting in the homes. Meeting with two or three families in one of their homes is one way a minister can get to know more people in less time. These kinds of meetings have been called "livingroom dialogues" and "creative conversations."

Another way the minister can establish personal relationships is through counseling. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. writes: "A minister's most intimate awareness of his people's inner worlds comes from his face-to-face relationships with them in pastoral care and counseling."⁴ Nothing can build a strong trusting relationship like showing a genuine concern for the needs, frustrations, and problems that people have in their inner worlds. If a minister will listen to his or her people in the study, they will listen to the minister in the pulpit. In the crisis situation the ministry of presence establishes a trusting oneness. If a minister will touch the people in their grief, he or she will be allowed to touch them in their growth.

Small groups have proven to be a tool to create intimate relationships. These small growth groups (eight to twelve people)

⁴Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Mental Health Through Christian Community* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 82.

share, pray, study and do social action projects together. The minister does not always have to be the leader or facilitator of the group. In fact, sometimes it is best not to be. The relationships that form in small groups are usually deep and lasting. The minister who will be involved in a small group must be willing to risk revealing his or her personality in an honest open way.

A relationship of love and acceptance can also be established from the pulpit. The minister who communicates the love of God in a real and relevant way is seen as a loving person, one who people can relate to outside the pulpit. A minister who is well-prepared, who speaks to the real needs of today, who helps people understand and grow in the Christian faith, is a person people want to know better. The minister has one opportunity a week to speak to the total congregation. This time should be seen as an opportunity to establish and strengthen relationships with the people.

If ministers are going to establish relationships with people, lay persons must be number one on the preacher's list of priorities. Ministers oftentimes get so caught up with their own ideas and causes, they forget the interests of the people. Ronald E. Osborn writes, "Jesus was a true humanist; . . . he identified with people rather than with ideas or causes."⁵ A minister who is genuinely concerned about what the people are thinking and where they are in terms of their Christian "pilgrimage," will be a good listener. For authentic

⁵Osborn, p. 27.

prophetic preaching to take place, trusting relationships must be established and the preacher's words must reflect a person who knows and understands the people's interests and hopes.

Emphasizing Common Agreements

After a minister establishes relationships and knows the interests of the people, he or she will usually find that there are areas where the congregation is polarized and areas where there is agreement. Emphasizing common agreements provides a place where a person can stand with the minister as well as with the other people of the congregation. Accentuating the positive is not a "cop-out" toward the polarized areas, but a method of building a rapport that frees people to deal with the more controversial issues.

Even when dealing with the areas of polarization, there can be a unifying point. Dennis Geaney writes:

In every issue over which people divide there is some point of agreement. It takes genius for a preacher to find this overlap--this point of agreement--and explore it with both sides without completely alienating either.⁶

The prophetic preacher should begin from this point of agreement reassuring the people that their beliefs are of value. From this base he or she should introduce other issues involved and what the Bible and theology have to say to them.

The minister who emphasizes common agreements is communicating

⁶Dennis Geaney, Preaching and Social Change," *Preaching Today*, VI:2 (1971), 6.

to the people that their ideas and beliefs are listened to and important. He or she communicates a "let's look at the issues and the Gospel together." Bishop Kennedy said: "For every time for a 'thus saith the Lord,' there are a hundred times for 'let us reason together!'"⁷ It is at this point the parishioner will trust the minister enough to listen to other beliefs.

Degree of Tension to Maintain

A minister who studies the situation, establishes relationships through pastoral care, and emphasizes common agreements to the point of letting the people know their beliefs are listened to and valued, puts himself or herself in the position to preach prophetically. This approach will earn for the minister the trust and respect from the parishioners that enables him or her to deal with the issues and be a change agent. This does not mean that everyone will agree with everything that is preached. In fact, authentic prophetic preaching will bring about tension.

There are ministers who feel that tension is bad, and that they should never venture ahead of the thinking of the people. They hold that a minister should not take a stand on any particular side of an issue but simply be a referee to make sure both sides fight clean. A minister risks alienating part of the congregation when he or she takes a decisive stand on an issue or preaches a "confronting Gospel"

⁷Gerald Kennedy, *The Seven Worlds of the Minister* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 89.

that is ahead of the congregation.

Tension is not necessarily bad and can be a healthy sign if it is supported by a strong pastoral care foundation. Research shows that a trusted minister whose views are generally respected by his or her congregation will produce a high degree of attitude change if he or she takes a position considerably ahead of them.⁸ This change producing tension should not happen just once or twice a year. Preaching "general" (weak) sermons to keep everybody happy and the budget intact, is not preaching the Gospel. A prophetic preacher creates change producing tension by speaking to the people's "growing edge." This kind of preaching needs to be done on a weekly basis.

Taking a prophetic position ahead of the people is not the same as leaving the people behind. A minister can show love and acceptance and still be prophetic. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. writes:

The common, erroneous assumption that there is an inevitable conflict between the pastoral and the prophetic, between counseling and preaching, results from false dichotomy--acceptance versus confrontation. Confronting a person with reality can be, in certain circumstances, the most accepting way of relating to him.⁹

Prophetic preaching creates a healthy tension by taking a position ahead of the people, speaking to their growing edge, and confronting them with reality and the truth of the Gospel in the midst of pastoral care and acceptance. Like the prophets, the contemporary

⁸Harvey Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Personal Growth and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 137, citing Arthur R. Cohen, *Attitude Change and Social Influence* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 29-31.

⁹Clinebell, p. 83.

prophetic preacher must speak boldly and courageously but with great compassion.

Being What You Preach

For Romeo in Hamlet, the question was: "To be or not to be?" For a minister to be authentically prophetic, the question is the same. A minister must not only be prophetic in word, but also in action. Although ministers continue to preach, churches have "empty pulpits." They are referred to as empty because although there are beautiful words coming from the pulpits, there are few ministers being what they preach. To be what you preach is also referred to as "truth through personality." Living the truth is the number one demand of a prophetic ministry. Teikmanis writes: "True preaching is not only speaking the truth; it is also 'doing the truth.' It is our participation in the redemptive drama of God. True preaching is contemporary incarnation of the Eternal Word."¹⁰

The greatest sermon a minister will ever preach is how he or she lives his or her life. The life style of a minister carries an impact that goes beyond words. Research has consistently found empathy, warmth, and genuineness characteristics of human encounters that change people for the better. Of these three, genuineness is primary.¹¹ The genuineness of a minister has to do with his or her

¹⁰Arthur L. Teikmanis, *Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 18.

¹¹Seifert and Clinebell, p. 121, citing Charles B. Truax and Robert R. Carkhuff, *Toward Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy*:

total person. It has to do with how he or she acts in and out of the pulpit, at home and at work, and in the local church and the community. People will listen to and heed the words of a minister in whom they see openness and honesty in his or her personality. Credibility is "key" to prophetic preaching. The data from different experiments show with reasonably good agreement that variations in the credibility of the communicator do indeed determine variations in attitude change: the greater the trustworthiness, the greater the change toward the position advocated by the communicator.¹²

There is a line that goes like this: Preacher, your actions are so loud I can't hear what you are saying." The prophetic preacher must be fully committed throughout the week so his or her words will "ring clear" on Sunday. Ministers who call upon their people to grow in their Christian faith and commitment, must also realize that they need to grow spiritually and continually rededicate themselves to their task. William Malcomson writes:

Preaching is a matter of who you are as a person. Are you bound or are you becoming free? No matter what you say, how valid it is, how correctly you say it, who you are will show through. And who you are not will show through. . . . People do not just listen to your words, my brother. They listen to who you are. They know you--often better than you know yourself. We have no business in the pulpit if there is nothing happening within us which is freeing us, developing faith in us, casting out fear in us, enabling us to share what we care about with people about whom we care.¹³

Training and Practice (New York: Aldine, 1967), p. 141.

¹²Arthur R. Cohen, *Attitude Change and Social Influence* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 29.

¹³William Malcomson, "The Preacher as a Free Person," *Preaching, A Journal of Homiletics*, V:2 (1970), 2, 3.

This does not mean that a minister must reach a state of "spiritual perfection" before he or she can preach prophetically. This means a minister should always be striving toward this state. A minister's spiritual growth depends on how willing he or she is to contemplate and study the deep meanings of life. Only when a minister has struggled with these questions in terms of his or her own life can he or she genuinely relate to people.

At the time I am writing this project, our country is realizing there is deep political corruption in our system. The Watergate scandal has exposed the abuse of power of the leaders in government, including the recent president. The American people's faith in our political leaders has been severely shaken. Some of the models that that people look to, especially young people, have lost their credibility. Today there is a great need for models that people can identify with not only at the national level, but at the local level. People need men and women in whom they can see the ideals of the Constitution, and more importantly, the ideals of the Christian faith, acted out. People need living examples of the "word become flesh."

The local minister has a great opportunity of being that much needed model. A person who is knowledgeable of the truth, speaks the truth, and lives the truth. A minister must be more than just a respected person in the community. He or she must respect the community by encouraging and challenging her through prophetic preaching and actions. People will commit themselves to growth, change, and servanthood if they can see and touch these ways of life in their

minister. A prophetic preacher must decide "to be" what he or she preaches.

CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPHETIC PREACHING TODAY

The Responsibility to Preach Prophetically

If ministers do not feel the responsibility to preach prophetically, the Church will cease to be the Church. Many ministers do not see the role of prophet as part of the parish ministry. They usually agree on the importance of the role of pastor, but do not have the confidence in their preaching or are unwilling to take the risk to preach prophetically. Ernest Fremont Tittle said:

The unwillingness of ministers and laymen to stick their necks out in the name of Christ is defeating the ends that the Christian Church came into being to serve. We preach the Cross of Christ; we sing about the Cross of Christ. There are times, my friends, when we have to take up this Cross in the sense of a little personal risk.¹

He said this twenty-five years ago. It is even more relevant today. The lack of authentic prophetic preaching is a major problem in the local church.

Today the challenge to local ministers, if they are to be pastors who genuinely care about their people, is greater than ever. There are no longer large "cathedral churches" or preachers of national prominence who speak to the critical issues from a Christian

¹James Armstrong, *Wilderness Voices* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 30, citing *Daily Christian Advocate*, Methodist Church (May 10, 1948), 443.

perspective. The only nationally heard voices are conservative evangelists such as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts who do not represent the prophetic style. The local minister's responsibility is to fill this prophetic and theological void. The powerful and influential voices of the media and politicians are more reasons why local ministers need to discern prophetically the issues and problems with which their people are struggling.

The minister's responsibility is to encourage his or her people to face the realities of life. People today are much like the people to whom Isaiah was prophesying who said, "speak to us smooth things."² The Church cannot be a 'garden' of smooth things. It cannot become an "ether environment" that puts people asleep to the hurts and pains all around them. It must not be a sanctuary where people can go to avoid the needs and problems of the world. No one is in a better position than the parish minister to help people deal with the realities of life. A friend who will not be honest and truthful with a person is not a friend. A minister who is authentically prophetic is also a loving pastor and a loving pastor is a true friend. A pastor prophet is always there to comfort his or her people when needed and also will confront them when confrontation is needed.

Many ministers feel that the responsibilities of the parish minister stop short of being prophetic. They have seen and heard of too many ministers who considered themselves prophetic yet became

²Isaiah 30:10.

alienated from their congregations and lost their chance for a "promotion" to their next appointment. Knowing this, and with our ego need for popularity and security, it is easy to rationalize by-passing an issue that may be controversial or confronting to any faction in the church. Harold Bosley writes:

Silence may be golden, as the proverb has it, for most men most of the time but not so for the preacher confronted by the unfolded issues of the life of his time. Nor will he hesitate long about speaking his mind as carefully and as forcefully as he can lest he prove to be in error in either or both insight and judgment. The one thing he cannot do is keep silence in their presence. If he belongs to the great tradition of preaching, he will know that it is better to be wrong than be silent in the face of the problems that are tormenting the thought and lives of his people. It is easy to explain mistakes for all honest men will understand and sympathize; it is impossible to explain silence, for none will listen.³

The minister must be a different "breed of cat" than that business person or politician who is frequently seeking the middle road of mediocrity to please the majority.

The spiritual growth of a church depends on the tone which is set by the minister. If his or her sermons are prophetically creative and relevant, seeds of ideas are planted in the minds and hearts of the people. Then the minister waters these seeds by his or her actions and life style. The people not only hear the Word of God, but see it lived out joyously. This kind of minister is contagious and affects the congregation. I would like to think these effects are mostly good, but what we have seen in our study of Tittle and Armstrong shows us

³Harold A. Bosley, *Preaching on Controversial Issues* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 20.

there can be serious negative effects. Although the negative responses are not what a minister works for, at least they indicate an awareness which could possibly lead to new insight and growth. There are many churches that are not the spiritually powerful forces in their community they could be. I refer to these congregations as those who are "messing in mediocrity." Without putting all the responsibility on the minister, he or she can and should set the tone. The type of tone being referred to is beyond the "first mile." It means going the "second mile" to a prophetic ministry.

The responsibility to preach prophetically is a responsibility to God and his Church. With all the demands on a minister's time this responsibility gets pushed aside and becomes unclear. The minister's many roles and duties do not have to be obstacles to a prophetic ministry. They can be seen and done as ways of acting out and supporting that which the minister is trying to communicate from the pulpit. No one felt the responsibility to preach more than the Apostle Paul who said: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"⁴ He preached a full and prophetic Gospel. This is the responsibility of the minister--to preach and preach prophetically.

Give Theological and Biblical Basis

The prophetic minister is a change agent. He or she preaches to the people's growing edge. For this kind of preaching to be heard,

⁴I Corinthians 9:16.

the congregation must believe in the credibility of their minister. Part of that credibility, as we discussed in the previous chapter, comes from the minister's personal life, or being "what" he or she preaches. The "what" must be more than just a personal observation. It must go deeper than the latest popular proclamation. It must be firmly founded on that which people trust and believe--the Bible.

Gerald Kennedy, one of the great preachers of recent times, writes this to ministers:

Let us be biblical. It is amazing how many people will shy off from hard sociological and economical pronouncements from secularists, but will listen to the same propositions if they come from the Bible and are couched in biblical language.⁵

The credibility of a minister's words and action must be deeply rooted in the Bible and theology.

People are satiated with opinions and information on issues from politicians, journalists, and television news commentators, but are starved for any theological input. Ministers should encourage their people to read and listen to different opinions, but should also be ready and capable to interpret the issues in the light of theology and the Bible. This requires continuous study of the Bible and theology and keeping abreast of current community, national, and world events. The leading voices in the "social gospel movement" from Walter Rauschenbusch to Shailer Mathews and Arthur Holt agreed that their message of Christian social action must be deeply entrenched in

⁵Gerald Kennedy, *The Seven Worlds of the Minister* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 89.

Christian faith.⁶ Prophetic preaching needs to make this connection very clear. This gives the people a sense of confidence and freedom. It brings them to a belief that leads to action. In mission through "servanthood" they become the true Church.

The Christian theological idea of "atonement" has strong social implications. Rauschenbusch suggests three ways in which the death of Jesus influences human thought and feeling. First, it was the conclusive demonstration of the power of sin in humanity. The religious and political forces of the day combined with the utmost energy to kill Jesus. Social forces today produced by humankind are creating vice and war. Second, the death of Christ was the supreme revelation of love. The social gospel is based on the belief that love is the only true working principle of human society. Love will support only a fraternal distribution of property and power, while force will support exploitation and oppression. The atonement is the symbol and basis of a new social order. Third, the death of Christ has reinforced prophetic religion. The prophet becomes a prophet by a personal experience of God. This religious experience gives the prophet new social consciousness, an unusual sense of the value of life and a strong compassion with the suffering and weak, and therefore a keen feeling for human rights and indignation against injustice.⁷

James Armstrong writes: "If the pulpit is to play a vital role

⁶Bosley, p. 20.

⁷Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), pp. 267-276.

in the renewal of the Church it must be faithful to its biblical roots and rich heritage."⁸ This does not mean that every sermon has to be based on a Bible story. It does mean that preachers should use the great themes of the Bible to show people what God is calling them to be. It does mean that preachers should preach a theology of hope, courage, and involvement, and love and concern. Theological and biblical preaching spoken and acted out in love is authentically prophetic and can renew the Church.

Present Other Viewpoints Fairly

The prophetic preacher who creates a respected and loving pastoral relationship with his or her people, realizes and is sensitive to their different views and feelings. It is important that these differences be respected. However, this does not mean the sermon has to be compromised to "nice nothingness." People will usually listen to one whom they trust and who acknowledges and shows understanding of their feelings. This creates an atmosphere of fairness and openness, and facilitates change.

Social psychologists Hovland, Janis, and Kelly drew from two experiments concerning the effects of a one-sided versus two-sided communication and concluded this:

. . . a two-sided communication is more effective in the long run when, no matter what its initial opinion, the audience is exposed to subsequent counterpropaganda or when, regardless

⁸James Armstrong, *The Urgent Now* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 17.

of subsequent exposure, the audience initially disagrees with the position advocated by the communicator. . . . the two-sided argument apparently prepares the listener to meet counterarguments.⁹

Two-sided communication means presenting the other point or points of view before presenting the view that the preacher favors. The experiments also showed that people are more apt to change their attitudes if the position they favor is stated first.¹⁰

Presenting other viewpoints fairly is especially needed when dealing with controversial issues. The preacher must realize when he or she is asking people to face an emotionally packed issue, there are tensions which must be relieved before the listeners will relax and hear the sermon with an open mind. When their side of the issue is not stated and dealt with fairly, they feel betrayed and left out. They feel that the preacher doesn't care about their views and react negatively. They close their minds, usually before the sermon is finished, and retreat in their attitudes to an even more unchangeable position. On the other hand, when they feel their position has been seriously and fairly considered, they will hear the other side in a positive frame of mind.

A prophetic preacher does not verbally push people into a corner leaving them no sense of freedom to choose. He or she does not give out simple and absolute answers to complex problems. Seifert and Clinebell remind preachers of God's way of communicating with people

⁹Arthur R. Cohen, *Attitude Change and Social Influence* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13.

as spoken by Isaiah, "Come let us reason together." Prophetic preaching should not equate communication with "telling people" but with exchanging meanings.¹¹ This kind of atmosphere can be created by a preacher who sincerely and thoughtfully explores the other viewpoints.

Know Your Own Feelings and Be Committed to Them

A prophet is decisive. He or she speaks and acts in a clear and committed way. A prophetic preacher is in touch with his or her feelings. Through study and prayer the prophet interprets the situation in a way that he or she believes is God's will for the people. When the prophet steps into the pulpit, both sides of the issue are communicated fairly, but there is no ambiguity in his or her words. Earlier in the dissertation the models of Tittle and Armstrong illustrated a deep commitment to preaching what one believes. This "power to be" was a result of being in touch with God and with themselves--or being in touch with themselves through God.

"Knowing your feelings" involves more than a minister just thinking: "Well, how do I feel about it?" The sensitivity of a minister to be in touch with himself or herself requires times of spiritual growth through devotional practices. Praying, reflection, and contemplation are precious moments to a minister who is to preach

¹¹Harvey Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Personal Growth and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 135, 136.

prophetically about life. The minister must speak with God and plumb the depths of his or her own thinking. The contemporary minister is a very busy person. It is easy to rationalize a low priority to devotional practices. This is a serious mistake. The minister, if he or she is to be prophetic, needs this time to "get himself or herself together."

"Knowing your feelings" also involves personal experiences. As was stated earlier, Tittle did not come to know his deepest feelings about war until he experienced the battlefield. Armstrong's feelings toward racism gained a courageous sharpness when he worked in the inner city of Indianapolis. Getting out and talking, walking and working with people gives the minister insights at the best possible level. Here again, the importance of a time of reflection is needed to interpret the experiences.

When the prophetic preacher speaks, he or she must strive for accuracy. The minister must base his or her feelings on sound information and statistics. This requires a discipline of reading and studying. This can be seen as a drudgery or as a joy. If it is approached as the weekly chore of "grinding out" some material for the sermon, then it becomes dreaded. But if it is approached with the expectation of an "ahah" experience, then it is a joy. These "ahah" or learning experiences are instrumental in a minister's coming to know himself or herself.

The prophetic preacher is deeply committed to his or her convictions. Being deeply committed does not mean cold alienating

rigidity, but warm concerned firmness. Seifert and Clinebell state: "Being firm and showing one's conviction on important issues are vital. Apparent weakness invites attack, particularly from extremists of either pole."¹² The minister who can stand firm on the unpopular side of an emotionally charged issue but still communicate love and concern to his or her people, is the prophetic pastor.

Commitment involves responsibility to God and the people. The prophet's task is to preach the Word so as to inspire and free people to act. The preaching of a minister who is an incarnation of his or her sermons communicates the inspiration. People can hear and see the convictions of their minister. The convictions are not abstractions, but are real life concerns and actions. The concreteness of them is touchable but does not entrap them. They feel free to accept or reject them. This sense of realness and freedom leads people to a deeper commitment in their own lives.

A minister who does not come to a sense of deep commitment cannot be a prophetic preacher. One who continually floats from one idea to another on the "wave of popularity" has no roots in the prophetic tradition. Eloquent and entertaining preaching is pleasing but not necessarily powerful. The minister who knows his or her feelings and is committed to them brings power to the pulpit. It is a power that causes people to hear, to grow and to act.

¹²Ibid., p. 139.

Touch People at Experiential Level

Prophetic preaching must go deeper than just being heard. It must be experienced. When the preacher touches people at the experiential level they experience the reality of what is being preached. There is an emotional response as well as an intellectual response. Real prophetic preaching brings about a "gut reaction." People are mentally and emotionally moved to a clearer understanding of what is being said and what it is that they are to do.

Knowing about God and about the grace and judgment of God is not enough to bring a person to a spiritual rebirth. The sermon must do more than inform the people about God's love. There must be a personal sense of feeling this love. This is the experiential level. If the preacher does not reach this level with the congregation, it is purely an "academic exercise" and is not prophetic preaching.

Touching people at the experiential level means touching people where they "live" or where they are at that particular moment. It is prophetic preaching that involves them in thinking about who they are and the meaning of their lives. It is a feeling that the words preached are for them and their situations. They become emotionally caught up in the message of the sermon. The experience causes them to reflect on their past and present lives. It brings new insight to their thinking and living for the future.

If prophetic preaching is "emotional" preaching, let us be sure that we understand what this means. There is a style of preaching that manipulates or plays with people's emotions. I refer to this as

"emotionalism." The preachers who use this method, although many of them are sincere in their efforts, do not touch people at the experiential level. The congregation may leave feeling they have had a real experience, but come to realize later that it did not stay with them as they faced the secular world. What they had experienced was not the Gospel, but the style or the antics of the preacher. Prophetic preaching is emotional preaching in that it evokes from people a feeling of identity with what is being said. It plants seeds that grow and bring people to a theologically sound commitment. Emotions are a part of every person's natural make-up. A preacher should not be afraid to arouse the emotions of people. On the other hand, he or she should be respectful of the listeners' emotions and not sink to emotionalism.

How does a preacher touch that experiential level that evokes response? First, the preacher must radiate a warmth and love that reflects the God he or she is preaching about. This was discussed in the previous chapter in the section, "Being What You Preach." I want to re-emphasize the importance of a genuine loving and caring attitude of the preacher in and out of the pulpit. A preacher communicates through his or her presence. This is not because he or she uses emotionally packed words or has a dramatic style. It is because he or she exemplifies the love of God and mediates it to the person in the pew.

A second way of touching people at the experiential level is by preaching an "earthly relevance." By "earthly relevance," I mean

strengthening the scripture and theology with actual personal examples and true life illustrations. I refer to it as "earthly" because when the scripture and theology have left people a little shaky from lack of understanding, illustrative material that clarifies the point gives the people something solid to stand on. If people are to experience the sermon they must feel a part of it. Personal and true life illustrations give them a point of identity with what is being said. They can substitute themselves in the illustrations and realize the reality and the truth of the situation. It is at this point they are touched at the experiential level which brings about a positive attitude toward change and spiritual growth.

Using the arts is another way of allowing people to experience the Word of God. Music, drama, pictures, dancing, etc., can penetrate the purely rational level sometimes when words cannot. Although these forms of communicating the message can stand on their own, I am not suggesting that they replace the sermon. I have felt a keen sense of dialogue between me and the people when I have used music or drama in the sermon. I realize that every minister cannot sing or play an instrument. A parishioner or the choir could help in this case. I would be disappointed to think that every preacher did not have dramatic ability. This is not for the preacher to become a show or to take an ego trip. If the arts are used in the midst of sound theology and a warm and genuine style, they can enable people to back off from that which is blocking their view and see life from a new perspective. They cultivate their imaginations and allow them to dream dreams.

This is not an escape but a way to bring people to reality, a reality in which they can experience hope and love.

Set up Tension Not Between Preacher and Hearer,
But Between Hearer and Gospel

Prophetic preaching is not soothing to a congregation, but it is good for a congregation. Prophetic preaching is not saying what the people want to hear, but what they need to hear. The content of the sermons at times will be controversial, confronting and demanding. Ministers preaching new ideas and ways of looking at issues can expect a "split-decision" of acceptance by the congregation. It is easy to reason that a minister who preaches split-decisions very often could become alienated from his or her people. The people could come to view this person in the pulpit as one who is against what they believe and is trying to manipulate them. The sermons could be heard as only his or her personal beliefs and need not be taken seriously. This is why the minister seeking to preach prophetically must not allow the tension to be between the preacher and hearer, but between the hearer and Gospel.

Laurence Hull Stookey warns that prophetic preaching should not come from personal bitterness but from the demands of the Gospel. He writes:

If the preaching proceeds from personal pique there may be no redemption at all. If the preaching is truly prophetic, those who refuse it bear the responsibility themselves; the preacher has fulfilled his calling. If there is to be offense, it must be offense inherent in the Gospel, not in the

preacher. When the preacher is indicted, he has little with which to defend himself. But the Gospel is its own defense, for the God who gives it promises that it will not return to him empty but, accomplish the purpose for which he sends it.¹³

Creating tension does not necessarily bring about bad results. Tension can be constructive. It can be the impetus for growth if created in an atmosphere of love. Prophetic preaching brings about tension through interpreting and communicating the Gospel in a way that puts demands on the people. Their life styles are called into question. Their complacent attitudes toward change are challenged. When the demands and challenges are clearly seen as the teachings of Christ, the people are faced with a decision. This decision, whether to accept the teachings of Christ or to rationalize them away, creates tension.

The prophetic preacher can do no less than to preach the "full" Gospel. It is tempting to preach grace and leave out the judgment. The preacher can create a world of spirituality that is disconnected from the real world. He or she can paint such a pretty picture that the people think nothing more is expected of them than to attend worship and go through the ritual. The preacher who shys away from the tension-producing elements of the Gospel is not being true to his or her calling and cannot be prophetic. Sometimes the preacher needs to show how the Gospel makes demands that judge him or her and that he or she does not like. The responsibility of the prophetic preacher

¹³Lawrence Hull Stookey, "Prophetic Preaching or Personal Pique," *Preaching Today*, VI:1 (1971), 32.

is to preach the "full" Gospel. When this is done the responsibility is with the hearers. It is now up to them to decide what action they will take. The tension is not so much between the preacher and the hearer, but between the hearer and the Gospel.

The minister's psychological well being is dependent on his or her ability to create tension in a constructive and growth producing way. His or her mental attitude of love for people cannot be genuine in the midst of constant personal disagreement. The people must view their minister as a man or a woman preaching for their benefit. They need to understand that the words of their minister must sometimes hurt before they can help. They need to understand that their minister's responsibility is to God to communicate his will to them. If the minister can bring his or her parishioners to these understandings, prophetic preaching can take place. The tension will be creatively at work and the people will begin to realize their responsibility to respond to the tension in a Christian way.

This does not mean that the prophetic preacher's job is done. It is at this point the role of pastor becomes dominant in the relationship between the prophetic preacher and his or her people. It is during this time of tension this struggle between old ideas and new ones, that the prophet needs to be a loving, guiding pastor. A person's theology, or the ways in which he or she thinks of God and the Church, is something that must be considered and handled with the utmost sensitivity and pastoral care. The pastoral prophet realizes the importance of a person's coming to his or her own conviction. Although

it might be in disagreement with the minister's interpretation, there can still be growth in the thinking through and the struggling with new ideas. The prophetic pastor creates positive tension through preaching and encourages a Christian decision, but does not alienate or manipulate his or her people.

Small Groups as Support for Prophetic Preaching

Preaching prophetically means the people hear, understand, change, and act. The prophetic preacher today realizes this cannot always be accomplished from the pulpit alone. The pulpit needs the support of study and discussion, and this means small groups. The effective use of small groups can change preaching into prophetic preaching. Clyde Reid suggests that the church needs to use small groups to study the Christian faith and its implications, rather than depending upon the sermon to educate the congregation on major issues.¹⁴

Preaching is enabled to inspire people to change and act when it is supported by small groups. The message of the preacher is heard in a more understanding and open atmosphere as a result of small group study and discussion. A minister in the Bayou country of Louisiana tells how he preached interracial love and justice at great emotional cost and, for all his efforts at preaching, seemingly made no converts to the cause. He later started a small study group. Although the issue of race was not the subject of the study, as the people developed

¹⁴Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 117.

a trusting relationship they began to talk about racial issues. It was discovered that many of the people might have responded in their hearts when the minister preached on race, but felt they would lose face or be ostracized by the community if they identified with the minister. The small group created a free thinking and speaking atmosphere in which the people were able to respond to the minister's sermons.¹⁵

One of the serious problems with most preaching is that it is monologic. Members of the congregation feel as though they are being "preached at" rather than "reasoned with." There are questions raised that go unanswered and points that are misunderstood. As the minister preaches Sunday after Sunday people's frustration of not being able to express themselves builds. A priest confesses: "Most congregations have no chance to express their minds, and so they sleep all through the sermon, lulled by the drone of our voices." A judge states: "I listen just so long, and the sermon raises so many questions in my mind that I can't ask, that finally I quit listening and it just goes in one ear and out the other."¹⁶ The people become lost and begin to feel insignificant. They feel as though their concerns are viewed as unimportant. This blocks prophetic preaching.

Small groups as support for preaching can alleviate this frustration and feeling. It gives the minister and the people a chance

¹⁵Dennis Geaney, "Preaching and Social Change," *Preaching Today*, VI:2 (1971), 7.

¹⁶Reid, p. 19.

to gain a clearer understanding of what is trying to be communicated. The minister can begin to feel the dynamic that is occurring in the congregation as he or she preaches. The dialogue that the prophetic preacher creates during the sermon can be strengthened and expanded in the small group.

Using small groups to have a question and answer period with the minister after the sermon has four options. The congregation can divide into small groups for discussion, immediately after the sermon, returning to the sanctuary to complete the worship service after the discussion period. Under the second option the minister arranges for those who wish to remain after the service to meet in another room to discuss the sermon. The third option is the same as the second except the minister would not be in the room during the first part of the discussion to allow more freedom for the expression of disagreements and negative feelings. The minister would come in for a while toward the end of the discussion to clarify particular questions which may have arisen.¹⁷ A fourth possibility is each Sunday after church a small group (different each time) meets to discuss into a tape recorder their reaction to the sermon. Though the minister is not present, people know he or she will listen to the tape; they will have a chance to be heard.

Another frequent characteristic of preaching, which is the opposite of prophetic, is irrelevancy. Preachers are answering questions no one is asking. The prophet's message is shaped by what is

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 106, 107.

"going on" in the marketplace. The prophetic preacher must be in touch with the pulse of the people. Small groups can be an effective tool in helping the minister to become aware of the realistic pressures and problems of his or her people. A group of lay persons meets to discuss the text for the following Sunday. The minister presents a brief background for the scripture of the week, in order to make clear the basic meaning of the passage. Then the people divide into small groups of eight or ten persons to discuss the passage for forty minutes. The groups reassemble for brief reports. The evening closes with a fifteen minute period of prayer and meditation.¹⁸

Small groups are becoming popular as a method for education and counseling, but have not been fully realized as a support for preaching. Their potential for creating an atmosphere for free speaking, better communication, and relevancy is great. The use of small groups as support for preaching needs to be utilized and explored further by ministers looking to be prophetic.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 108, 109, citing Browne Barr, *Parish Back Talk* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 76-82.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I began this paper by saying the lack of prophetic preaching in the church is a major problem. As preaching has weakened so has the church. Although the local church provides the best opportunity for authentic prophetic preaching, there are very few ministers who are doing it effectively. Either ministers preach, thinking they are being prophetic, in a way that alienates their people, or through their pastoral functions they develop relationships they feel would be jeopardized if they preached prophetically. I am suggesting that the role of prophet or pastor must not stand by itself. My thesis is: If authentic prophetic preaching is going to take place, it must have a firm pastoral care base.

Historically and theologically the prophetic office is seen as very important in biblical times. There is much that can be learned from the prophets of the Old Testament. However, they were not faced with the variety of duties of the pastor, and the cultural environment is much different. Prophetic preaching is greatly needed in the church today in a way that is relevant to modern humankind. My definition of prophetic preaching is preaching that deals with all of life; from personal salvation to social witness. It is taking the great themes of the Bible and bringing their truths to bear on the personal lives of people. It is helping people to see the ethical and social demands

of the Gospel. Prophetic preaching involves a person. A person who can create a relationship of trust and respect between himself or herself and his or her parishioners. A courageous person who preaches from a deep commitment to God and his Church, and compassion for people. A person who can communicate God's love even in the midst of conflict and controversy.

The lives and sermons of Ernest Fremont Tittle and James Armstrong have exemplified the influence prophetic preaching has had, and can have, on people's lives and the structures of society. The social sciences of psychology and sociology provide research tools and resources for building a prophetic style of ministry. Knowing the dynamics of motivation and change in the individual and the group is necessary for the prophet.

I have tried to paint a vivid picture for the minister of the great need for prophetic ministry. I have tried to use some colors that show opportunity and other colors that portray great responsibility. I hope I have not allowed those colors that represent "risk" to be brushed on too lightly. Risk is a reality that is very much a part of prophetic ministry. I agree with Tittle who said that ministers must be willing to stick their necks out in the name of Christ. Ministers must take up the Cross even when it involves personal risk.

The prophetic preaching pastor is the person in the church who will never go out of style. Although the definition may change, the need for challenge, guidance and love will always be needed by people. The minister who can create a firm pastoral base on which he or she proclaims the "whole" Gospel, is the authentic prophetic preacher.

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